



Michael Livingston and John William Sutton

Reinventing the Hero: Gardner's *Grendel* and the Shifting Face of *Beowulf* in Popular Culture

Making the rounds at film festivals in 2006 was a work entitled *Beowulf and Grendel*, an Icelandic production directed by Sturla Gunnarsson and starring Gerard Butler, who recently played the title role in the film version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*. Although as of this writing its US distribution has been limited, *Beowulf and Grendel* will undoubtedly bring the story of the monster-slaying hero to a wider audience and a more prominent place in the popular consciousness. Beowulf, it would seem, is making a comeback.

In fact, he never really left us. In twentieth- and twenty-first century Anglophone culture, the impact of Beowulfiana — what we call that amorphous mass of materials that have accumulated around the poem — has been widespread yet subtle. Beowulfiana, it turns out, is a lot like Grendel: always close at hand, but lurking just out of sight. Since the publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's seminal essay "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*" (1936), if we are to select an arbitrary cut-off date, there have been two plays, six musical or symphonic productions, more than a dozen novel-length retellings,¹ at least fifteen children's books, five comic books or series, numerous poems, parodies, short stories, computer games,

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films, an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*, and even Mardi Gras tokens that have direct connections to the poem. Our intention in this essay, however, is to illustrate how one specific adaptation — John Gardner’s 1971 novel *Grendel* — acts as a marked turning point in Beowulfiana, after which these disparate materials tend to become far more sophisticated examples of social commentary.

In order to demonstrate the effect of *Grendel* upon subsequent adaptations, we will first consider the nature of Beowulfiana in the decades prior to the novel’s publication. One of the earliest retellings of the poem was a children’s story from 1895 entitled “Beowulf,” by Mara Pratt. This adaptation is from a book called *Stories from Old Germany*, a compilation of medieval works that are presented like fairy tales. Children’s stories make up the earliest major category of Beowulfiana, and take their place beside the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century adaptations of other medieval narratives, such as the Arthurian legends and the Robin Hood tradition. Pratt’s “Beowulf” and other contemporaneous children’s versions retell the original story in a very straightforward fashion, deviating from the poem only to relate the events in a different order, to cut out the dragon episode or some other segment of the poem, or to add material that links *Beowulf* overtly to the Scandinavian literary and mythological tradition. A more renowned “children’s” story to call attention to in this regard is Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937), which is in large part a rewritten *Beowulf*, though Tolkien goes much further than his contemporaries in creating a very particular reshaping for very particular purposes.² W. H. Canaway’s *The Ring-Givers* (1958), meanwhile, was the product of a popular author of historical fiction, and it is hard to imagine that Canaway’s work did not help to influence one of the most famous retellings of *Beowulf*, Rosemary Sutcliff’s *Beowulf: Dragonslayer* (1961). Though written for children, Sutcliff’s book covers the whole of the epic, from Grendel to his mother to Beowulf’s fall against the dragon. It is a compressed narrative — she cuts the digressions and other “atmospheric” bits of the poem — but an effective one, and it opened interest in *Beowulf* to a whole generation of English readers.³

While each of these authors has taken the basic *Beowulf* narrative and put his or her own spin on it, the common thread to these texts — with the possible exception of Tolkien’s *Hobbit* — is that they still support the received interpretation of the poem: that Beowulf is the hero *par excellence*, and that Grendel is a fiendish monster. In all of these early works, Beowulf stands as a representation of what is best in his culture. He is — or in some cases he *becomes*, by virtue of his growing up — the ideal man and the ideal hero. The texts present Grendel, in turn, as the lonely outcast who dwells in the wilderness, the very antithesis of the heroic world of the mead-hall and the fellowship of fighting men. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, Grendel’s severed arm hanging from the rafters of Heorot functions as a very public warning to anyone who would transgress the values of the dominant culture, as represented by Beowulf (23-24).

There is no real challenge to these characterizations of hero and monster until 1971, when John Gardner, both a medievalist scholar and a novelist, published his groundbreaking book entitled *Grendel*. Gardner turns the original story upside down and inside out, retelling it from the perspective of the monster. Gardner humanizes Grendel, transforming him from an animalistic creature into a sentient being with human emotions. His Grendel is also a deeply introspective character, one who struggles to find his place in a world he does not understand. Grendel remains the adversary of human culture, but through his eyes we see a human culture that is ugly and flawed.⁴ Early in the tale, as he observes the carnage wrought by the warfare of human tribes, Grendel remarks: “It was confusing and frightening, not in a way I could untangle. . . I was sickened, if only at the waste of it: all they killed—cows, horses, men—they left to rot or burn” (36). In this and other passages, Gardner presents a decidedly unfavorable view of Germanic warrior culture, which is epitomized by a cruel, inscrutable, anti-heroic Beowulf. As such, *Grendel* strongly resists that familiar but too easy distinction of “good hero” and “evil monster.”

This idea proved to be a watershed moment for Beowulfiana. Most of the recent adaptations of *Beowulf* show clear evidence of having

been inspired by Gardner, a fact that would come as no surprise to one reviewer of *Grendel*, Carl Ladensack, who argued that the novel speaks far more effectively to the people of today than does its source. It is no coincidence, then, that in the years following the publication of *Grendel* there was an explosion of Beowulfiana, in all kinds of different media. It was as if Gardner had opened the doors to reading *Beowulf* in new and exciting ways. Of course, certainly not *all* *Beowulf* narratives of the past three-and-a-half decades have based their interpretations on Gardner's work, but his subversive *Grendel* has provided many other creative minds with an ingenious vehicle for social commentary.

The first place Gardner's influence appears is in comic books, beginning with Michael Uslan's six-issue DC Comics series that ran from 1975 to 1976, *Beowulf: Dragon Slayer*, in which the Scandinavian hero (complete with requisite hornéd helmet) is a wandering adventurer, accompanied by a group of boon companions that includes an Amazonian named Nan-Zee. And his travels are wide, indeed: he flies into space with the Lost Tribe of Israel, and even manages to be present at the sinking of Atlantis. Along the way, he has fights with Dracula, aliens in flying saucers, the Serpent of Satan, and, of course, *Grendel*. The *Grendel* in this series is straight out of Gardner's novel: he is introspective, inquisitive, and resents being used as the tool of his master Satan. Despite Uslan's mind-boggling disregard for historical accuracy, he offers a *Grendel* that transcends the monster's role in the earlier children's books, where *Grendel*'s actions had no motivation, for in those texts he existed simply to oppose — and then to be publicly destroyed by — the hero who represented the values of the dominant culture.

Michael Crichton's recasting of *Beowulf*, in his novel *Eaters of the Dead* (1976), is less directly influenced by Gardner's work — his image of *Grendel* is that of the masticators in the title — but a close examination of his themes shows some interesting parallels, as Crichton uses the poem to investigate contemporary sociological phenomena. In particular, his focus is on our media-driven world and our willingness to accept misinformation as reality. Crichton's work begins with an introduction stating

that he has simply translated a particularly fine German philology-based edition of Ibn Fadlan's *Risala*, a work originally written in Arabic. Crichton casts all of this in an academic way: he includes historical background to Fadlan's journeys, a detailed account of the manuscript's provenance, and even a large number of footnotes — items that all seem to guarantee credibility. And, in fact, there *was* an Arabic traveler named Ibn Fadlan, he did write the *Risala*, and *Eaters of the Dead* is a translation of that text — but only for the first two chapters. Crichton takes the historical meeting of Fadlan with the Rus as a means to introduce the story of *Beowulf*: Crichton's Fadlan is forced to accompany a Viking leader named Buliwyf (i.e., Beowulf) to battle a people called the Wendol (i.e., Grendel). Crichton tells it all as a mere translation of the *Risala*, continues to provide footnotes to that effect throughout the text, and even attaches both an appendix — in which he discusses a number of academics who think the Wendol were an isolated group of Neanderthals — and a bibliography for further research. It all looks very scholarly, and yet Neanderthals have been absent from the archaeological record for tens of thousands of years, and the final item in Crichton's bibliography is *The Necronomicon*, the name of a famously non-existent work coined by H. P. Lovecraft. As a society we have been taught to trust the printed word, and Crichton's book is an entertaining lesson about the dangers of trusting without examination and judgment.

We return to more overt examples of Gardner-inspired works when Grendel appears as a human — and a criminal — in Matt Wagner's acclaimed 1980s comic book universe centered around the many men and women who have worn the distinctive black-and-white mask of the assassin known as Grendel. The first and best known of these characters is Hunter Rose, a genius, novelist, expert swordfighter, dashing rogue, underworld hit-man, and crime syndicate boss — all by the age of 17. Though his protagonist is an assassin, and an amoral character at best, Wagner uses Grendel to lay bare the seedy underside of America; Grendel may transgress the values of modern American culture, but, at the same time, he exposes the hypocrisies and vices of that culture. Wagner further



destabilizes the expected hero-villain paradigm with the character who is Grendel's primary foe: Argent, a wolf-man who functions as the Beowulf figure. Like the Beowulf from Gardner's novel, he is not presented as a righteous hero, and, though his ultimate triumph over Grendel may be assured, it is no symbolic victory for the values of the establishment. In Wagner's bleak world, Argent is just another monster.⁵

Though Wagner's supplanting of *Beowulf* from the medieval world to the modern might seem somewhat disconcerting to anyone longing for the simplicity of the original story, it is only a slight change in comparison with the time shift accomplished by science fiction legend Larry Niven. In 1987 he joined with two other science fiction writers, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes, to pen *The Legacy of Heorot* (and its 1995 sequel, *Beowulf's Children*), a story about two hundred people who travel to a distant planet they have named Avalon. The colonists soon encounter reptilian creatures of remarkable speed, strength, and intelligence who attack their settlement with relentless ferocity. As one might imagine, much bloodshed ensues.⁶ The "grendels," as the colonists name these creatures, react to the human presence in ways similar to Gardner's Grendel. They deem the humans "invaders," and are confused and angered by these aliens who have infested their territory. As one of the grendels thinks to itself: "The invaders were rivals, and they were cheats! They were something that it did not understand at all, something that could hurt it in a way that it had never experienced pain, inspire a fear that was quite new to it" (77). By telling parts of the story from the grendels' perspective, the authors complicate an otherwise straightforward narrative of good humans battling evil monsters, and raise questions about the moral implications of the humans' colonial ambitions.

The next major literary retelling is Parke Godwin's *Tower of Beowulf* (1995), which sets Beowulf's life story amidst the cosmic struggle between the fading Norse deities and the emerging Christian faith. Grendel comes off as one of the most compelling characters: initially, he believes that he is a handsome lad growing up in the mythic land of Asgard, but this is only a dream woven by the magic of his mother Sigyn, a shape-shifting

demigoddess. In reality, as Grendel later learns, he and his mother are hideous creatures, outcasts from Asgard and feared by man. “I am no monster!” Grendel exclaims to the god Thor (49), and indeed like Gardner’s Grendel he strains to comprehend what he is and how, if at all, he fits into the strange world of the humans: ““Why?” The animal sound of him heaved with human anguish. “How? If—if I am a beast, where did I learn of beauty? If I am human, why am I so, why is it all taken from me like this?” (54). Godwin follows Gardner in humanizing Grendel by giving him clear motivations for his behavior. We can understand Grendel’s bitterness and anger at realizing that his idyllic life was all an illusion. We even find out that his rather morbid attachment to Heorot is based upon a reasonable prior claim to Hrothgar’s land.

Quite different from its predecessors, Frank Schaefer’s retelling of *Beowulf*, *Whose Song is Sung* (1996), places the entire account in the voice of Musculus Herodes Formosus, an ex-courtier and ex-jester who is by turns banished from Byzantine Constantinople, enslaved by Germanic traders, and set upon by bloodthirsty raiders only to wind up joining a group of Vikings led by Beowulf. When the not-so-merry band crosses the sea in order to win glory in battle with Grendel, Musculus goes with them and is instrumental in helping to defeat both Grendel and his dam. Musculus is telling his tale, apparently, because he is rather disgruntled about being left out of the “official” account of the story as it is being told by bards. *Whose Song is Sung* subverts the poem’s traditional conceptions of heroism and masculinity, presenting as its primary hero a dwarf who makes his way in the world through sheer wit and moxie, not a handgrip with the strength of thirty men.

The most recent longer literary retelling is Neil Gaiman’s 2004 novella “Monarch of the Glen,” a sequel to his best-selling novel *American Gods*. Published as part of an anthology in which authors returned to fantasy worlds that they had made famous, “Monarch” tells a tale set in the harsh northern reaches of Scotland, where a cult has managed to keep the old Viking gods and spirits (including Grendel and his mother) in a kind of stasis by annually reenacting Beowulf’s defeat of Grendel, who is



here a young, entirely hairless, slow-witted young “man” who must partake in the ritual whether he wants to or not. Here again Grendel is, Gardner-like, a being of nature outside the pale of human law, the victim of Beowulf’s near-pathological need to torture and kill him. The pity that the main character, Shadow, has upon him — a pity that places Shadow in the guise of the Norse god Balder in a rich overlapping of mythologies — is truly Grendel’s salvation, releasing him and his mother from the perpetual torment of their persecutors.⁷

Even the cursory examination of novels, comic books, and children’s books that we have seen thus far is daunting in its range of coverage. But this hardly even begins to approach the full spectrum of Beowulfiana.⁸ Music constitutes another major category.⁹ A defiantly subversive Grendel, straight out of Gardner’s novel, can be found in the music of the British rock band Marillion. The song “Grendel” is from their 1983 debut album, *Script for a Jester’s Tear*. In this lyrical rock ballad, Grendel has come to the Danes to punish them for their evil ways. To Grendel, these men are the real monsters: he points out how they lie and betray, kill each other with no shame, and lust for gold. He is here to exact punishment. One Grendel who was clearly *not* derived from Gardner, however, is the monster that appears in *Beowulf, A Rock Musical*, by Ken Pickering and Keith Cole (1986). This Grendel is used not to challenge the establishment, but to demonize those who do. Here he is not literally a monster, but a leather-clad punk rocker with a cockney accent. The punk was a figure admired by many for his resistance to the official culture of Margaret Thatcher-era Britain (consider the Sex Pistols, for example), but this play presents the punk as an outcast, an entirely marginalized figure whose opposition to the establishment is distorted into criminality. The clear-cut evil and unexamined Otherness of Pickering and Cole’s Grendel have indeed become a rarity in the post-Gardner era.

Naturally enough, filmmakers have not been blind to the rising interest in *Beowulf*. The first major appearance of the poem on film is, not surprisingly, an adaptation of Gardner’s work. Alexander Stitt’s *Grendel Grendel Grendel*, a 1981 animated feature from Australia, is marketed

as a children's movie, but it retains the intellectual complexity of *Grendel*. The film's protagonist, voiced by Peter Ustinov, is a green, alligator-like creature that is more cute than terrifying. Grendel, at first ignorant of mankind, watches the humans with fascination, torn between his desire to be accepted by them and his growing understanding that these foolish, superstitious, irrational humans are not worth the trouble. As in Gardner's novel, we behold humanity through the eyes of this outsider, allowing the filmmakers to poke fun at the vices and foibles of modern Western culture. By the end of the film, Grendel has taken the advice of the all-knowing dragon and comes to embrace his status as marginal to the human community — as the dragon puts it, he is mankind's "anti-man" — and ultimately sees himself as superior to these strange creatures.¹⁰

Many other *Beowulf* adaptations have appeared in both film and television since the 1980s,¹¹ most notably *The 13th Warrior* (1999), starring Antonio Banderas and directed by John McTiernan. This highly entertaining film is based on Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead*, and preserves some of the novel's social commentary. A Hollywood retelling that is closer to Gardner's vision, however, can be found in a *Star Trek: Voyager* episode called "Heroes and Demons" (1995). This adventure takes place mainly on the starship *Voyager*'s holo-deck, a room that produces computer-generated illusions that human beings can interact with. The holo-deck can be set to depict many different environments, and in this story one of the crew members has programmed it to create the world of *Beowulf*. Problems arise, however, when crew members begin to vanish. Captain Janeway decides to send in the ship's doctor, who happens to be a hologram himself, figuring that since he is not human he might be able to withstand whatever is happening to the crew. The doctor, playing the role of Beowulf, is beset by Grendel, who appears as a kind of amorphous ball of light — with tentacles. Later in the episode, Captain Janeway discovers that Grendel is an alien life-form that the crew had picked up without realizing that it was a sentient organism, and the creature had seized the crew members only because *Voyager* had captured it first. This episode seeks to tell a more progressive version of the *Beowulf* story, where



Grendel is not a monstrous image of all that the dominant culture despises, but rather a rational and ultimately peaceful being whose story is used by the television creators to convey a lesson about tolerance.

These many works that muddle the moral clarity of good hero against evil monster are largely indebted to Gardner, but they also highlight a theme that may be lurking in the original poem. Some scholars have perceived that the medieval poet hints at a blurred distinction between the hero and the villain. Beowulf himself might be seen as monstrous, as Stanley Greenfield argues in his essay “A Touch of the Monstrous in the Hero, or Beowulf Re-Marvellized.” After all, Beowulf is far different from the other men in the poem: he possesses superhuman strength, in combat he grapples his foes like a beast, he seems to be able to breathe underwater, and he has amazing vigor even at the end of his long life. Interestingly, the poet refers to both Beowulf and Grendel with the term *aeglaeca* (or *aglaeca*), an Anglo-Saxon word with a range of meanings, according to Bosworth and Toller, including “miserable being, wretch, miscreant, monster, fierce combatant.” The term is also used in reference to creatures as varied as the legendary hero Sigemund, the dragon, various sea-monsters that Beowulf slays, and a feminine form is used to describe Grendel’s Mother. The word seems to be a catch-all term for supernatural beings on the margins of the human world.

It is not surprising that creative minds have latched on to this aspect of Beowulf and Grendel’s relationship, for in our postmodern, post-Vietnam, post-9/11 era, ideas of black-and-white morality have been greatly complicated and problematized. This sentiment is reflected well in an otherwise ridiculous 1999 film entitled *Beowulf*. Directed by Graham Baker, the film is set in a post-apocalyptic neo-medieval future that, not surprisingly, has a great many internal inconsistencies (they have microwaves, apparently, but still fight with swords). The time-warp feel of the film is made all the stranger when Roland, of *The Song of fame*, makes an appearance as a warrior. The title role is played by Christopher Lambert, and his Beowulf is not the aristocratic leader of a band of loyal followers, but a brooding loner with a dark, troubled past. He is the bastard son of

Bane, the god of evil, and while Hrothgar and the others do not know this fact, they sense that Beowulf is somehow different and immediately distrust him. The chief exception is Hrothgar's daughter Kyra, whose romantic overtures Beowulf initially spurns because he has no wish to bring her into his lonely world. Later, when he squares off against Grendel, he repeatedly remarks that he and the monster are kindred creatures of darkness, and before battling Grendel's Mother — here portrayed by a former *Playboy* Playmate — the hero is offered the opportunity to join her side. So although the film is cringingly hokey and melodramatic, it effectively illustrates the idea of the *aeglaeca* — that Beowulf and the monsters may have more in common than we care to admit. Likewise, the new Icelandic film, *Beowulf and Grendel*, continues this notion of mingling manhood and monstrosity. In doing so, it stays true to Gardner's vision of a more human Grendel who acts according to a rationale the audience can understand, and perhaps even sympathize with.

There are more retellings to come. An opera based on Gardner's *Grendel* and directed by Julie Taymor recently debuted in Los Angeles, and a *Beowulf* film using performance-capture animation, directed by Robert Zemeckis and written by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary, is slated for a 2007 release. These and other projects, we hope, will continue to spur interest in the poem and encourage more forays into Beowulfiana.¹² And whether these and other future re-imaginings are visual, aural, or literary, we can have little doubt that each will say as much about the person doing the telling as it does about the poem itself.

We should like to end by returning once more to Tolkien and the critical stance of "*Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics*," in which the poem is literature on its own terms, a good story which retains the ability to fire our imaginations. He would likely approve, then, of calling attention to the attempts of modern writers to continue this process by reshaping *Beowulf* in new ways for new generations of readers. In another of his famous lecture-essays, "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien wrote that the power of fairy stories is in their capability to feed our imaginations not as some simplistic means of escapism but as a remarkable means of finding life and



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understanding reality via “escape.” The re-formation of Beowulf, the changing face of the seemingly ever-malleable man and his supposed enemy, is evidence enough of the continued power of such ideals; this would surely have given Tolkien much pleasure. He would have seen in such acts the very same passion for storytelling that not only sparked his own creative drive, but surely stirred that of the anonymous hand who wrote the original poem so long ago.

Michael Livingston

The Citadel

John William Sutton

State University of New York--Brockport

Notes

¹ For a listing of literary works, see Marijane Osborn’s “Annotated List of Beowulf Translations.”

² See, for example, Glenn, “To Translate a Hero.” Tolkien’s masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, is also deeply indebted to the poem.

³ Some of the very best children’s versions have appeared in more recent years, and include Katz’s *Beowulf* (1999), Kimmel’s *The Hero Beowulf* (2005), and K. H. McMullan’s Dragon Slayers’ Academy series, which began in 1997. The first book, *The New Kid at School*, introduces the central hero of the academy, Wiglaf (who, in the original poem, is Beowulf’s loyal companion and heir). As one might imagine, the series owes much to Harry Potter, also first published in 1997.

⁴ For studies of Gardner’s social commentary, see, for instance, Fawcett and Jones, “The Twelve Traps,” and Milosh, “John Gardner’s ‘Grendel.’”

⁵ Jerry Bingham’s 1984 graphic novel *Beowulf*, by way of contrast, is a more by-the-book retelling of the poem. So, too, Gareth Hinds’s three-part graphic novel, *Beowulf*, published in 1999 and 2000, which utilizes three radically different artistic styles to recreate the three radically different episodes in the poem’s narrative: the fights with Grendel, his dam, and the dragon.

⁶ Some bloodshed, but also much hilarity, ensues in Holt’s *Who’s Afraid of Beowulf?* (1988). For whimsy (and a decidedly incomprehensible plot), see also Hill’s cyberpunk retelling, *True Confessions of a Dumpster Diver* (2000).

⁷ It is difficult to approach Gaiman’s work in Beowulfiana, though, after knowing that his first foray into utilizing the poem as a fictional backdrop came in 1998,

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when he wrote a short story in verse form entitled “Bay Wolf,” which combined *Beowulf* with, of all things, the TV series *Baywatch*.

⁸ Among information technology gurus, for example, a Beowulf is a cluster of personal computers linked by high-speed networking technology that collectively become a supercomputer that is far more than the sum of its parts (Sterling). The poem’s major characters have been made the subject of countless artistic depictions, such as those by Rockwell Kent in 1933. Beowulf and Grendel have also appeared as characters in collectible card games and as miniatures for use in role-playing games. Even better, Grendel is the name of a vatted malt whisky from Glasgow, a drink that no doubt struggles for the palates of the British against the beverages produced by what is surely its arch-enemy of business, the Beowulf Brewing Company of Birmingham, which has been in business since 1997. Almost all of the Beowulf brews are, in one way or another, related to the epic: Dragon Smoke Stout, Wergild, Finn’s Hall Porter, Gold Work Wheat, Grendel’s Winter Ale, Heroes Bitter, Mercian Shine, Swordsman, Wiglaf, Beorma, Noble Bitter, Hengist, Dragonfire, and our personal favorite as far as beer names go: Glutlusty. Beowulf’s nemesis, moreover, even has his own video game, the online *Grendel’s Revenge*, released in 2002, whose overview is striking in playing off of not only Gardner, but also a mishmash of other mythological and legendary materials. Finally, one scholar (Schichler) even claims that Dr. Seuss’s Grinch is based upon Grendel!

⁹ Beowulf has been the name of at least two bands, both in the heavy metal genre. Not to be outdone, Grendel has lent his own name to three musical groups: a grunge-rock group, a post-punk group from Washington, DC, and an electronica-industrial duo whose members are named, respectively, VLRK and 4NIT4. Far earlier, in 1925, the American composer Howard Hanson was inspired by William Morris’s translation of *Beowulf* to write musical accompaniment to the hero’s funeral: Opus 25, “Lament for Beowulf,” is one of his finer pieces.

¹⁰ Contemporaneous to *Grendel Grendel Grendel* is 1981’s *Clash of the Titans*, which grafts Greek mythology to a *Beowulf* plot-arc through the person of Perseus, who faces first a Grendelian Calibos, then a Grendel’s dam-like Medusa, and finally a draconic Kraken.

¹¹ First was the little-known *Beware: Children at Play* (1989). To summarize: This is a “bizarre low-budget horror film [that] pits a UFO investigator and his friends against a cult of cannibalistic children who murder any adults foolish enough to stray into their realm deep in the woods. The children are led by a boy who witnessed the traumatic death of his father (a professor of Anglo-Saxon literature, no less!) and now believes himself to be Grendel. All the major characters, as well as the evil children, are wiped out by the end of this poorly written, poorly acted film” (Sutton 12). *Beowulf* was also set to be the subject of an episode of PBS’s *Wishbone* series before it was canceled. The adaptation did make it into print, however, as *Be*



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a Wolf! (1999), the first in a series of short novels for young readers that continued Wishbone's literary retellings. In 2000, the sixth and final season of the campy cult television show *Xena: Warrior Princess* had a series of episodes in which Xena joined with Beowulf in adventures that loosely tied together the plots of *Beowulf* with Wagner's ring cycle, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, and even a bit of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale. Although Beowulf never made an appearance alongside Xena's fellow heroine Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the Geat warrior and the slayer from Sunnydale are analogous in many ways, as David Fritts argues in "Warrior Heroes: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Beowulf." Fritts notes, among other interesting points, that Beowulf and Buffy have comparable fighting styles (favoring hand-to-hand combat, while eschewing the preferred weapons of their respective ages), and that both heroes face similar types of foes (foes that become increasingly more dangerous to the hero as time progresses). Editor's note: Greenfield's foregrounding of the monstrous and marginal in the hero can also be seen when, in the series' last season, Buffy's superhuman strength is revealed to come from a touch of demonic power in the Slayer lineage; and the series' ensouled vampires Spike and Angel in some ways recapitulate Grendel's reinvention.

¹² We know of at least three academics who have written short stories about some of the poem's events; see, e.g., Livingston's "The Hand That Binds" (2005).

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